

Candidate Conservation

Program Element		FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Enacted	FY 2007			Change From 2006 (+/-)
				Fixed Costs & Related Changes (+/-)	Program Changes (+/-)	Budget Request	
Candidate Conservation	\$(000) FTE	9,142 71	8,619 71	+125	-681	8,063 71	-556 -

Summary of FY 2007 Program Changes for Candidate Conservation

Request Component	Amount	FTE
Program Changes		
• Idaho Sage Grouse	-296	0
• California Fisher	-296	0
• Program Management Savings	-89	0
Total, Program Changes	-681	0

Justification of 2007 Program Changes

The FY 2007 budget request for Candidate Conservation is \$8,063,000 and 71 FTE, a net program decrease of \$681,000 and 0 FTE from the 2006 enacted level.

Idaho Sage-Grouse (-\$296,000) - In FY 2006, the Service modified an existing cooperative agreement with the Idaho Office of Species Conservation (OSC), the Governor’s oversight office for Federally listed, candidate, and petitioned species to transfer \$296,000 for greater sage-grouse conservation in Idaho through habitat improvement projects, sage-grouse research and management projects, and implementation of the Idaho Sage Grouse Management Plan (Management Plan). The Service is not requesting additional or continued Candidate Conservation funding for this effort in FY 2007 since the State of Idaho and the Office of Species Conservation are eligible to apply for grant funding for sage-grouse conservation actions or plan implementation through the Service’s State Wildlife Grants program. After a recent status review, the Service determined that listing the greater sage-grouse as threatened or endangered was not warranted.

California Fisher (-\$296,000) - In FY 2006, Congress provided \$296,000 to plan and implement conservation actions for the west coast distinct population segment of the fisher, a candidate for listing under the ESA. Service staff worked with other state and federal agencies and timber companies in California, Washington, and Oregon to obtain key biological information and draft a conservation strategy which could preclude the need to list the fisher. A primary element of the conservation strategy will be the reintroduction of fisher populations into portions of its former range. Key timber companies in California participated in the initial planning efforts and the Service is continuing to work with them to identify reintroduction opportunities and to develop complementary CCAAs. The Service assisted the State of Washington by providing additional funding to support completion of their efforts to reintroduce fisher on the Olympic Peninsula. The Service encourages interested parties to apply for grant funding through the Service’s State Wildlife Grants program. The Service proposes to discontinue funding this program element to fund other priority conservation activities elsewhere in the budget request.

Program Management Savings (-\$89,000) - To enable the Service to address its highest priorities during constrained fiscal times, the Service proposes reducing program administrative funding by \$1,980,000. Using Activity Based Cost information and other budgetary analyses the Service anticipates

achieving a savings of \$89,000 in Candidate Conservation. These savings will be realized by streamlining program administrative support activities.

Program Performance Change

The requested budget change will not affect performance of the Candidate Conservation Program. Funding provided for General Program Activities in fiscal year 2007 will allow the Service to meet performance targets. For further information on performance data, please refer to the Program Performance Change table at the beginning of the Endangered Species section.

Program Overview

The Candidate Conservation Program focuses on identifying species that are candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act (Act) and proactively works to conserve them and thus prevent the need for listing. By partnering with private landowners, tribes, state fish and wildlife agencies and other federal agencies, the Candidate Conservation Program encourages, through voluntary programs, conservation agreements and habitat restoration to benefit at-risk species. The Candidate Conservation Program supports the DOI Resource Protection strategic goal by providing technical assistance on implementing conservation actions, assessing the status of candidates and other declining species, and providing technical assistance to facilitate cooperative development of conservation agreements and implementation of conservation actions. Increased emphasis is being given to coordination between the Candidate Conservation Program, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and other Service programs that can contribute to the conserving at-risk species. Working together more closely across programs within the Service and linking to the priorities identified in the new Comprehensive State Wildlife Conservation Strategies will provide a more strategic focus for conservation efforts. This collaborative approach to conservation also will help improve efficiencies and performance for all the involved partners.

Robust Redhorse Conservation Initiative – When the fish was rediscovered, partners in South Carolina launched conservation actions to prevent the need for listing under the ESA.



Preventing the Need To List Species: A Collaborative Process

Technical assistance and facilitation are key to the Candidate Conservation Program. Service biologists deliver expertise to facilitate conservation efforts by various partners including other federal agencies, state fish and wildlife agencies, tribes, and private landowners. Interested partners work with the Service to determine what could be done to conserve a declining species. Working through these partnerships, recommendations are developed that can be useful to individual landowners interested in implementing voluntary conservation measures on their property, as well as broad-scale conservation strategies that can guide efforts on multiple land ownerships.

Recommendations developed collaboratively with states, territories, other federal agencies, tribes, and the private sector and private landowners are the basis for implementing actions that can prevent or remove the need to list declining species under the ESA. The Service believes facilitating conservation actions by our partners through the Candidate Conservation Program helps remove restrictions on various activities that can occur when a species becomes listed, and realize savings in the Listing, Consultation, and Recovery Programs.

The Service has identified 283 plant and animal species as of December 31, 2005 as candidates for listing. For many of these species, conservation actions taken now may eliminate the need to proceed with listing, and for others, conservation actions taken before listing will assist in more rapid recovery and delisting.

Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) are voluntary conservation agreements between the Service and one or more public or private parties. The Service works with its partners to identify threats to candidate species and at-risk species to remove threats to assure they don't become candidates, plan the measures needed to stabilize and conserve them, identify willing landowners, develop agreements, and implement the conservation measures and monitor their effectiveness. A recent example of a multi-party conservation agreement is the CCA for the relict leopard frog (*Rana onca*), a candidate for listing. Signed in September, 2005, this CCA establishes a set of conservation measures for key habitat of the relict leopard frog in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah. Agencies contributing to this effort include the Arizona Department of Fish and Game, Nevada Department of Wildlife, National Park Service, and 12 other agencies and organizations.

Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) expand upon the success of traditional CCAs by providing to private landowners additional incentives for engaging in voluntary proactive conservation through assurances that limit future conservation obligations. One of the primary reasons why the Service developed the CCAA program was because of a concern by non-federal landowners about the potential regulatory implications of having a listed species on private land. The CCAA program specifically targets non-federal landowners and provides the assurance that if conservation activities are implemented they will not be burdened with additional restrictions if the species becomes listed under the ESA.

By reducing threats to species and their habitats before they become critically imperiled, future conservation efforts are likely to be less costly, more flexible, and more likely to result in successful conservation over time. Given the widespread support among the states and the Service's partners for the Candidate Conservation Program's proactive nature, we have numerous opportunities to continue with and expand upon the success of ongoing candidate conservation efforts, including those that are not part of a formalized agreement.

Candidate Species Assessment

Candidate species are plants and animals for which the Service has sufficient information on their biological status and threats to propose them as endangered or threatened under the ESA, but for which development of a listing regulation is precluded by other higher priority listing activities. The candidate review process is designed to provide a means for identifying species in need of the ESA's protection. Identification of such species assists the Service and our partners in prioritizing conservation efforts. Each year, the Service reviews the status of species previously identified as candidates to decide if these species should be removed from the candidate list or if the listing priority should change. The listing priority number is based on the magnitude and immediacy of threats to the species, as well as the taxonomic status. The Service also assesses the status of other species-at-risk to determine if these species should be elevated to candidate status. Annually, the Service prepares a Candidate Notice of Review for publication in the Federal Register. The Notice provides an updated list of candidate species and encourages resource managers to alleviate threats and thereby possibly remove the need to list species as threatened or endangered. The Notice includes a request to the public for additional status information for each candidate species and information on species that should be included or removed from future updates of candidates. The Service also describes progress undertaking listing actions and announces resubmitted petition findings in this Notice.

The Service uses the best available scientific information to assess species for consideration as candidates for listing. One chief source of information is the network of State Natural Heritage Programs databases,

which tracks species already imperiled and those that are declining or at-risk. This additional information, along with Service data and scientific information obtained through various other sources, also helps identify species that can benefit from early implementation of conservation actions.

2007 Program Performance Estimates – Candidate Conservation

In FY 2007, the Service continue providing technical assistance for developing CCAs, CCAAs, and to facilitate voluntary conservation efforts by private landowners, States, tribes, territories, federal agencies, and partners for candidate and other species for which potential listing is a concern. Proposed accomplishments include:

- The Service will complete assessments for 304 species under the candidate assessment process; these assessments will include information on threats to the each candidate species that can help guide the choice of cooperative conservation efforts.
- The Service will provide improved tools for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of candidate conservation efforts, such as identifying watersheds with multiple candidate species and other species-at-risk so that conservation efforts will be likely to benefit more species.
- As a result of technical assistance to partners, the listing of four candidate species should be unnecessary as a result of conservation actions or agreements.
- The Service expects to sign four CCAs and two CCAAs in FY 2007 based on recent years' numbers and the number of pending agreements. However, the exact number of CCAs and CCAAs signed in a given year depends on the number of interested partners, scope and scale of the agreement, and partners' timeline for working on these agreements.

2006 Planned Program Performance – Candidate Conservation

In FY 2006, the Service is continuing to provide technical assistance for developing CCAs, CCAAs, and to facilitate voluntary conservation efforts by private landowners, States, tribes, territories, federal agencies, and other partners for candidate and other species for which potential listing is a concern. Planned accomplishments include:

- The Service will complete assessments for 304 current and potential candidate species. The Service is giving extra attention to taxa that have had candidate status for more than 10 years to ensure they still meet our definition of a candidate species. In addition, the assessment process is giving greater emphasis to describing recommended conservation actions identified by state wildlife agencies and other experts, so as to better guide conservation efforts to reduce or remove threats so that listing candidate species might become unnecessary
- The Service and DoD will work to expand voluntary conservation efforts for candidate species in areas on or near DoD lands.
- The Service is continuing technical assistance for development of 10 CCAs, 3 of which are anticipated to be approved in FY 2006. For example, the Service anticipates completing a CCA for the yellow-billed loon in 2006 in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service, and Alaska Department of Natural Resources. The agreement will address conservation actions for the species in northern and western Alaska, including lands that are part of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A).
- The Service is providing assistance for 10 CCAAs, 4 of which are anticipated to be completed and signed in FY 2006. For example, in Montana, the Service is working with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and other interested parties to complete a CCAA to improve habitat for the fluvial Arctic grayling in the Big Hole River. Habitat enhancements and other conservation measures will be funded, in part, by conservation programs in the Farm Bill. The draft CCAA was issued for public review and comment in FY 2005.

- The Candidate Conservation and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife programs are coordinating closely to develop a more strategic approach to identifying opportunities for voluntary habitat restoration projects for candidate species on private lands. The focus is on identifying candidate and other rare species for which limited habitat on private lands is a substantial concern, and identifying and assisting private landowners who are willing to voluntarily implement on-the-ground habitat improvements that reduce or remove threats to such species.
- To provide improved tools for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of candidate conservation efforts, the Service is working with NatureServe to use information from the State Natural Heritage databases to identify watersheds in each State with multiple candidate species and other species-at-risk. Service field offices will use this information to work with State wildlife agencies and other partners to identify watersheds where expansion of on-going conservation efforts or development of new efforts are most likely to be effective in making listing unnecessary for one or more species. The approach will emphasize working with the States and using information, recommendations, and priorities provided in Comprehensive State Wildlife Conservation Strategies.

2005 Program Performance Accomplishments – Candidate Conservation

- The Service completed 307 assessments for current and potential candidates resulting in identification of 5 new candidate species. These assessments also resulted in removing two species from candidate status, the Alabama clubshell (*Pleurobema troshelianum*) and painted clubshell (*Pleurobema chattanoogaense*), based on recent genetic and morphological studies which showed these two taxa do not meet the Act's definition of a species.
- An extension of the Service's cooperative Species-at-Risk project funded by the Department of Defense continued through 2005. DoD and the Service have cooperated to group species with similar habitat needs found on and around four DoD installations in Georgia. Specific management guidelines were developed based on these habitat groupings so that management can be undertaken through a habitat-based approach. A greater number of species-at-risk will benefit using this concept. Preventing listing of species-at-risk through the management of particular habitats will help limit potential curtailment of operations, training and testing on military lands.
- The Service assisted in the development of 12 CCAs, 8 of which were signed in FY 2005, and provided technical support or monitored the status of implementation of approximately 100 existing CCAs. CCAs can address the conservation needs of both candidate and at-risk species to remove threats to assure they do not become candidates. For example, the Service continued to provide technical support for locally-based CCAs for the Gunnison sage-grouse, and participated with several other federal agencies, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources to complete the Gunnison Sage-grouse Rangewide Conservation Plan.
- The Service provided technical assistance for development of 10 new CCAAs; technical support and oversight for 8 previously signed CCAAs; and, completed 2 new CCAAs. Conservation efforts under one of the newly completed CCAAs, for the greater and lesser Adam's cave beetles in Kentucky, were key to the Service's decision to remove these two species from candidate status because threats had been reduced or removed to such an extent that listing these species is not necessary. The Service's Pacific Region completed the Southern Idaho Ground Squirrel Programmatic CCAA which covers non-Federal lands in three counties in Idaho. Parties to the Agreement include the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation, and the Service. Private landowners are encouraged to participate through Certificates of Inclusion.



Southern Idaho Ground Squirrel